

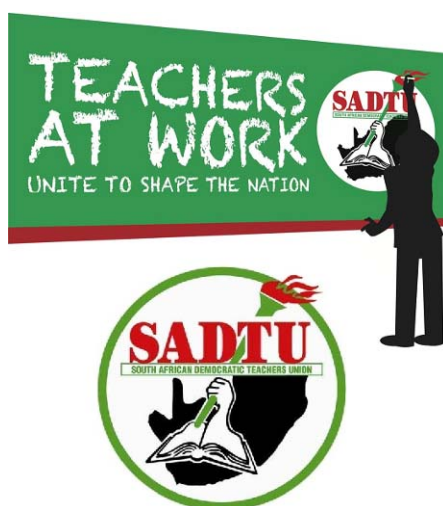


Oliver Reginald Kaizana Tambo
27 October 1917 - 24 April 1993

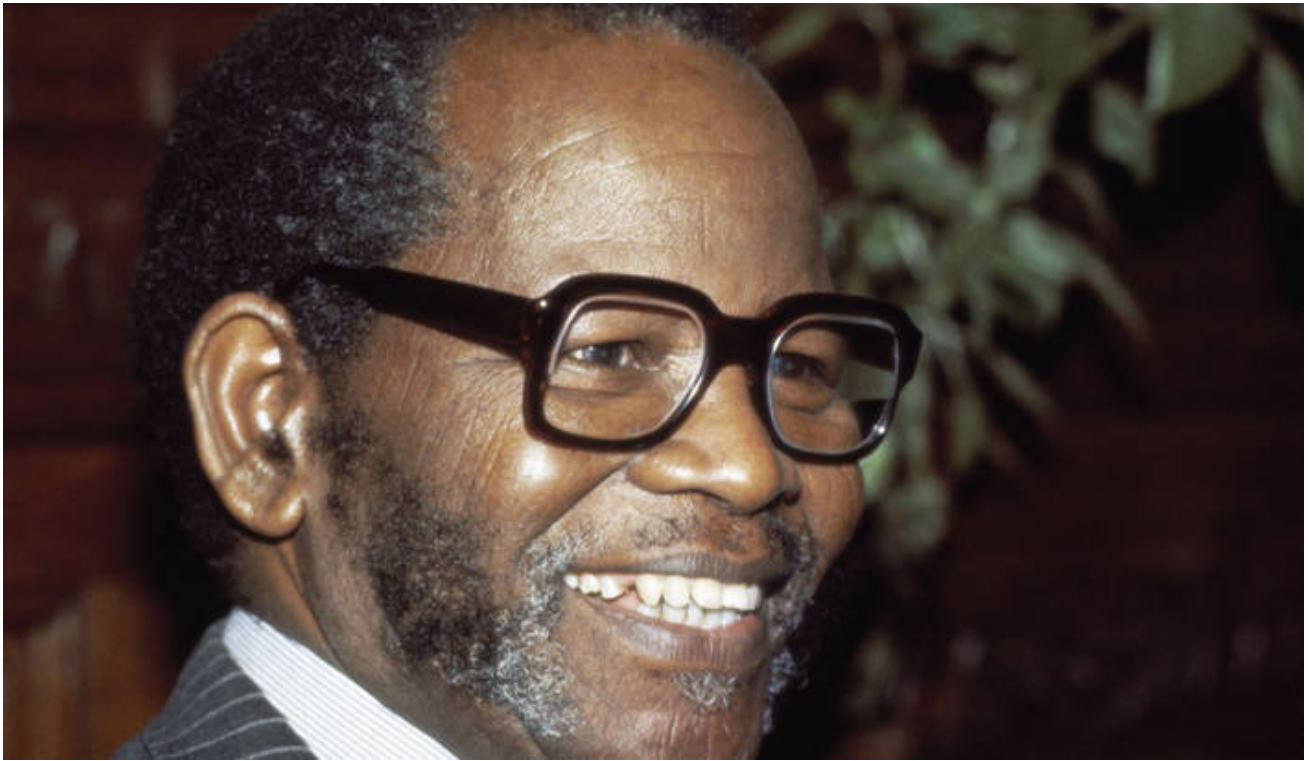
27 October, birth anniversary of

O R Tambo

A resource-book for educators



O R Tambo



O R Tambo, President-General of the ANC

Introduction

Oliver Reginald Kaizana Tambo was the Acting President and then President-General of the African National Congress (ANC) during the 30 years of its banning and exile.

His great achievement was to hold the ANC together for that thirty-year period from 1960 to 1990, when it had no ground to stand upon that it could call its own.

Many thousands of men and women were involved with the ANC in that time.

Constant tributes are still heard, as they have been for decades past, to the unique contribution of O R Tambo's personality, his courage, patience and humanity, to the endurance of the ANC through that long trial of its strength.

Tambo was among the famous group of founders of the ANC Youth League in the 1940s that included Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu. He was among the 156 who were "Treason Trialists" after the Congress of the People had adopted the Freedom Charter in the 1950s.



Mandela and Tambo at the OAU, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1962

As Deputy President of the ANC in the late 1950s, Tambo was selected to lead the ANC in exile. The ANC was banned after the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960. Tambo left the country. His wife, Adelaide, and their children, Dali and Thembi, followed.

The 1960s was the period when the majority of former African colonies gained their political independence. Oliver Tambo made the most of these circumstances. Under his leadership, and from that time onwards, the ANC grew into a worldwide political and diplomatic network, the likes of which had never been seen before.

Tambo established relations with the Anti-Apartheid Movement that had been founded in London in 1959, with the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, with the UN Centre on Apartheid, and many others.

O R Tambo was a Christian man who managed to work with, and to lead, people of many kinds, including communists. The memory of his life and spirit remain a guide to the South African people as to how to stay together, united and in action, through all kinds of difficulties. Many songs are sung about Oliver Tambo. He was loved.

Early life

Oliver Reginald Tambo (O R) was born in the village of Kantolo, in Bizana in eastern Pondoland (eQawukeni) in what is now the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, on 27 October 1917. His mother, Julia, was the third wife of Mzimeni Tambo, son of a farmer and assistant salesperson at a local trading store.

He attended a school at Holy Cross Mission School, and then transferred to St. Peters in Johannesburg. After matriculation he qualified to do his university degree at the University of Fort Hare.

Part 2

The 1940s and 1950s

In 1940, Oliver Tambo, along with several others, including Nelson Mandela, was expelled from Fort Hare University for participating in a student strike.

In 1942 Tambo returned to his former high school in Johannesburg to teach science and mathematics. So, before he was a lawyer, he was a well-loved teacher.

Tambo, Mandela and Walter Sisulu were founding members of the ANC Youth League in 1943. Tambo became the Youth League's first National Secretary, and in 1949 he became a member of the ANC's National Executive.

The youth league proposed a new 'Programme of Action'. They advocated tactics such as boycotts, civil disobedience, strikes and non-collaboration.

By 1951, both Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela had qualified as attorneys. They joined together as partners in the new firm of Mandela and Tambo.



O R Tambo, Attorney – a formal portrait

In 1955, the year of the Congress of the People, Tambo became Secretary General of the ANC. Walter Sisulu had been banned by the South African government under the Suppression of Communism Act. In 1956, the year that he married Adelaide Tsukhudu, Tambo was charged in the Treason Trial. These charges were only withdrawn in December, 1957.

In early 1958, Tambo was told by the leadership that he would be expected to go abroad with his family and lead the international side of the struggle.

In the ANC National Conference of that year, Tambo was elected Deputy President of the ANC under Chief Luthuli, with whom he had a very good relationship. In 1959 Tambo was served with a five-year banning order by the government.

The Sharpeville Massacre took place on 21st March, 1960. Tambo quickly left the country to take up his international mission. Banning of the PAC and ANC followed.



ANC President and Deputy President

Part 3

The 1960s



O R Tambo and Ronald Segal on their way to London in 1960

O R Tambo left the country in April, 1960, with Ronald Segal, and proceeded from Bechuanaland, with the help of Frene Ginwala in was in Dar-es-Salaam, and also with Indian diplomatic assistance, to London and then to the United Nations in New York.

The ANC was now banned inside the country, and was to remain so for nearly 30 years, all of which time passed under the ANC Presidency of O R Tambo, at first as Deputy President, and then, from 1967 following the death of Chief Albert Luthuli, as Acting President. In 1985, at the Kabwe conference, he became President-General.

Tambo's task was not only to hold the ANC together, but also to mobilise international opposition to Apartheid. More than that, it was his overall task to ensure that the ANC would return intact to South Africa, and achieve a victory over the racism regime. All of these things came to pass.

The Tambos settled in Muswell Hill, North London, with their children Thembi and Dali, in what remained their family home until 1990, although O R was often away. Adelaide worked as a nurse, and in due course became a senior manager.

ANC efforts to work in a united front with the PAC failed, but other developments in the 1960s laid down structures upon which the ANC was able to rely all the way through to the 1990 unbanning and on to the democratic breakthrough of 1994.

These structures were the launch of the people's army **Umkhonto we Sizwe** on 16 December 1961; the establishment of the **ANC Chief Representative system** in many countries of the world, as an unprecedented liberation-movement diplomatic corps, and a means of keeping the organization together; the growth of the **Anti-Apartheid Movement** and the **International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa**, in close co-operation with the ANC; and the beginning of **educational** initiatives by the ANC.

All of these things grew and flourished under the careful husbandry of the ANC's then Acting President, Oliver Reginald Tambo. Of course there were many other leaders in the ANC, as well as in its allied organisations, **the SACP and SACTU**, which had also established themselves in exile. There were strong personalities and outstandingly gifted individuals, many of them famous up to today, but they all respected the leadership of O R Tambo. He held them all together.



Conditions were often rough, and varied widely in the many different countries that gave hospitality to the ANC comrades.

In 1969, the ANC held a consultative Conference in Morogoro, Tanzania, which adopted the famous "Strategy and Tactics" document of the ANC. The outstanding personality in that conference, the unifier, is always recognised as being Oliver Tambo. With its "Strategy and Tactics" now understood and accepted by the movement as a whole, the slogan "Victory is Certain" was confidently adopted, as much as everyone knew that the struggle would be long.

There was no “lull” in the 1960s. On the contrary, it was in the 1960s that the timely groundwork was done, under the leadership of O R Tambo, which determined the shape and the extent of the victory that was achieved more than two decades later. If that groundwork had not been done, the activity that grew inside the country from the early 1970s onwards and through the 1980s would not have been channelled and united in the way that it was, under our liberation movement, the African National Congress. And without that unity in action, it would have failed.

One of the organisations that came onto existence in the 1960s was Umkhonto We Sizwe (“MK”). Other organisations that grew up during the time of O R Tambo’s leadership of the ANC in exile will be described in Parts 4 and 5, below.

Umkhonto We Sizwe (“MK”)



MK was launched on 16 December 1961. One of the founders was Nelson Mandela. Another was Joe Slovo. From the beginning, MK accepted the political leadership of the ANC. In 1963, most of MK’s High Command was arrested at the Rivonia farmhouse North of Johannesburg. Most of them were convicted, including Mandela, in the subsequent “Rivonia Trial”.

With Tambo in charge of the ANC, MK was re-established in exile, and it contributed in an indispensable way to the return of the ANC to the country, long before the legalisation of the ANC in 1990 (See, e.g. “Cooking the Rice Inside the Pot” by Jabulani Nobleman Nxumalo, a.k.a. “Comrade Mzala”).

Oliver Tambo not only led the ANC after its banning and exile, but he brought it home. Towards the homecoming of the ANC, Umkhonto We Sizwe was the most important material factor. Oliver Tambo understood the importance of MK and gave it his wholehearted support and leadership from its beginning, until his death, nearly 32 years later.

Part 4

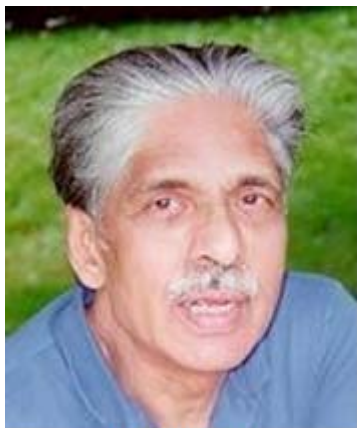
The 1960s and the 1970s

The United Nations Centre Against Apartheid



From his first visit to New York in 1960 onwards, Oliver Tambo had a good personal relationship with Mr Enuga S Reddy, an Indian career diplomat at the United Nations whose anti-apartheid work at the UN had begun in the 1940s.

Mr Reddy became Secretary of the **UN Special Committee against Apartheid** from 1963–1965 and Director of the **UN Centre against Apartheid** from 1976–1983. (Mr Reddy was awarded the Order of Companions of O R Tambo in Silver by President Zuma in 2013.)



E S Reddy



O R Tambo

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The ANC Chief Representative System



Under O R Tambo's leadership, the ANC developed, from the 1960s onwards, a worldwide diplomatic and organisational network. Some of the countries where there were "Chief Reps" included Canada, the USA, Cuba; Britain, France, Sweden, the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Union; Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique; and India.

In many of these countries our Liberation Movement was given full diplomatic status.



Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC



Ruth Mompati
London



Mendi Msimang
New Delhi



Mosie Moolla
Cairo

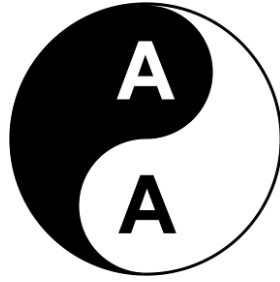


Dulcie September
Paris

Some Chief Representatives of the African National Congress

Hundreds, if not thousands of ANC comrades served in its offices around the world, under the leadership of O R Tambo, over a period of three decades. This is a story that has not yet been fully told.

The Anti-Apartheid Movement



The Anti-Apartheid Movement was a British mass democratic movement of volunteers, founded in 1959, the year before O R Tambo left South Africa. The AAM was dedicated to people's direct action against apartheid, and in particular, to the boycott of South African goods and services of all kinds, and of South African sports, arts and culture.



O R Tambo
ANC President



Abdul Minty
AAM Honorary Secretary



Mike Terry, AAM Executive Secretary

The International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa



Canon John Collins, Dean of St Paul's
International Defence and Aid Fund for
Southern Africa



Oliver Tambo, President
African National Congress

The International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF) was a funded non-governmental organisation (NGO) founded by Canon John Collins, an Anglican clergyman who had already met O R Tambo in South Africa in the 1950s. The Collins and the Tambos became lifelong friends.

The AAM and IDAF played complementary roles:

The AAM raised awareness across the political spectrum in Britain and in the world. It had a newspaper (Anti-Apartheid News) and it organised very large and quite frequent demonstrations, and other events, for over three decades. In due course the British AAM was backed up by the establishment of other voluntary Anti-Apartheid movements in the Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden, New Zealand, the USA, and other countries. The creation and maintenance of all of these organisations was the result of the hard work of hundreds of thousands of individuals over many years.

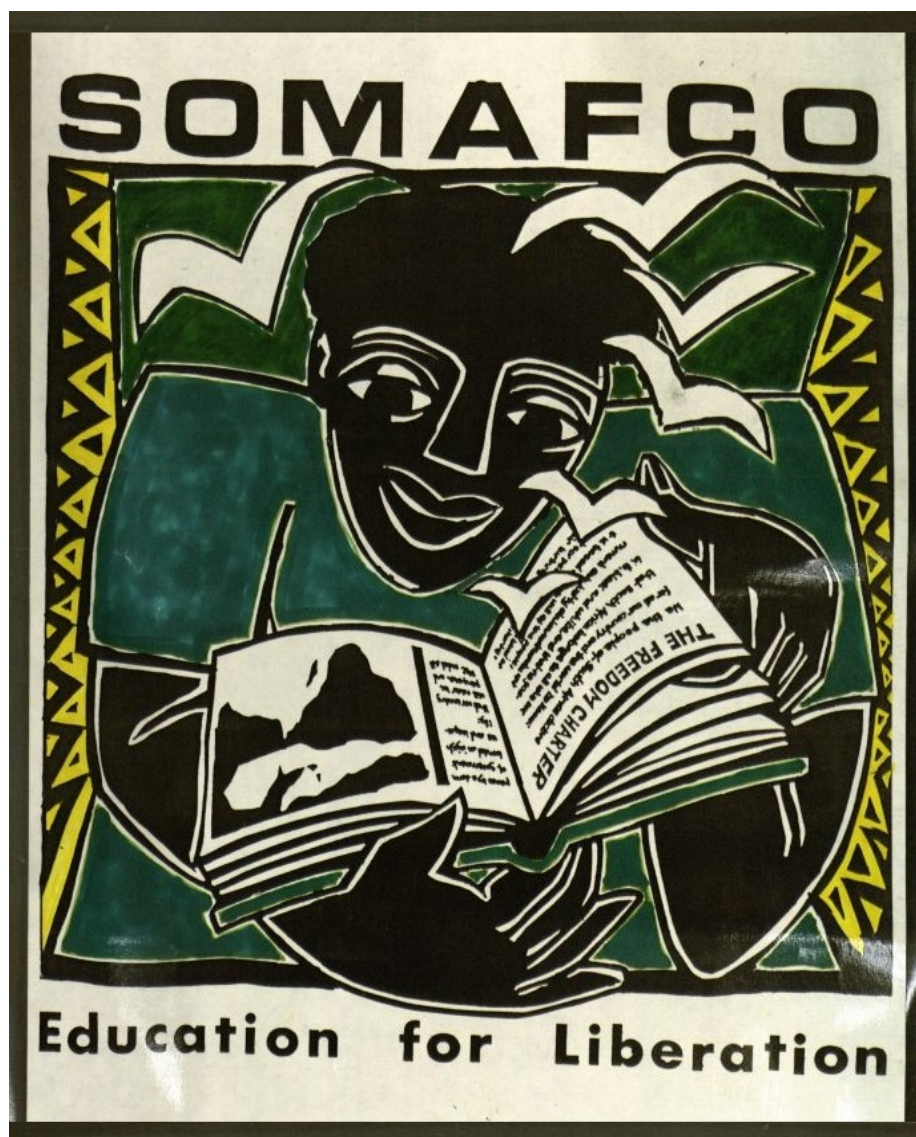
IDAF supplied money to defence lawyers and towards the upkeep of the families of people in political trials in South Africa under the apartheid regime. Hundreds of millions of dollars were raised and sent. IDAF maintained offices in London, where archives were kept up to date, books and films published, and information supplied to the movement and to the mass media.

The personal relationship that O R Tambo had with these organisations was crucial.

Part 5

The 1980s

In exile, under the respected leadership of Oliver Tambo, the alliance of the ANC with the South African Communist Party (SACP), and with the non-racial trade union federation, SACTU, remained firm and survived.



Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College



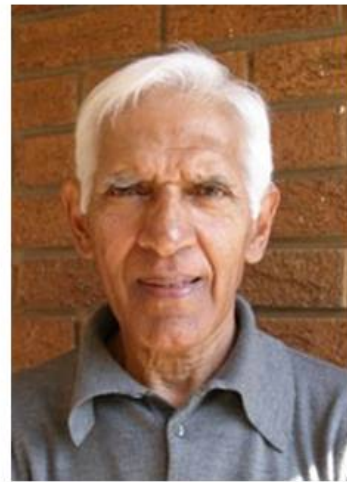
Oliver Tambo with a child



OR Meeting Students at Dakawa



O R at the Primary School, Mazimbu



Mohamed Tikly, Director of SOMAFSCO

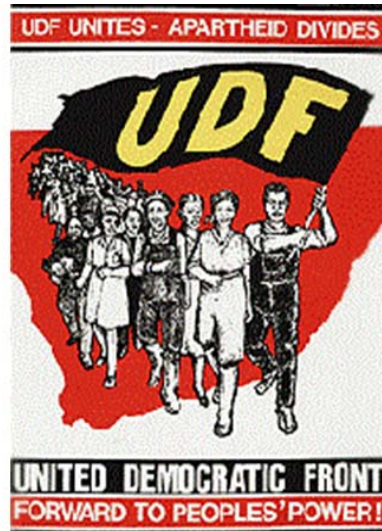


Under O R Tambo, the ANC paid attention to education. In Tanzania, SOMAFSCO prepared students for entry to universities around the world, and pioneered the ANC's development of education for liberation, and for people's power.

Part 6

Return

At the Kabwe (Zambia) Consultative Conference of the ANC in 1985, O R Tambo was elected President of the ANC, no longer “acting”, confirming his long personal leadership of the movement. In the years that. By that time the United Democratic Front had been formed inside the country. COSATU, a new federation of trade unions and successor to SACTU, allied to the ANC, supporting the Freedom Charter, was formed in the same year of 1985.



The authority of the ANC was by this time unquestionable. In the years that followed, South Africans made their way north to consult the ANC. Victory was indeed certain, although the last years of the apartheid regime were violent and bloody. The unbanning of the ANC and the ANC followed in February, 1990.

In August 1989, O R Tambo suffered a stroke. On 13 December 1990, in time for the Consultative Conference of the ANC, the Tambo family returned to South Africa. At the 48th ANC National Conference in July, 1991, O R Tambo relinquished the Presidency in favour of his friend and law partner, Nelson Rolihlala Mandela, himself becoming National Chairperson of the ANC in July of the same year.



Tambo and Mandela reunited after 28 years, Sweden, 12 March 1990



Adelaide Tambo, 18 July 1929 – 31 January 2007



O R Tambo, 27 October 1917 - 24 April 1993

O R Tambo died aged 75,
from complications of a
stroke, on 24 April 1993